

# PRESS RELEASE

## CONTACT INFORMATION:

LeeAnn Nixon, WEDC President  
336-838-1501  
lnixon@wilkesedc.com



## RELEASE DATE:

Monday, June 20, 2022

## Leonard G. Herring Family Foundation to Fund Comprehensive Wilkes County Childcare Study

**North Wilkesboro, NC** – In response to community needs, The Leonard G. Herring Family Foundation announced today the funding of a comprehensive childcare study for Wilkes County and the organization of a taskforce to guide and monitor progress. The study will provide documentation of existing services and resources, then recommend steps to create an innovative childcare ecosystem in Wilkes County, NC to enhance the labor force participation and create a healthy environment for families. The study will also identify the roles that community stakeholders must play in order to expand access and affordability for quality care.

“Improving access, quality, and affordability of childcare in Wilkes County is both a social and economic imperative,” said Craig DeLucia, CEO of the Herring Family Foundation. “Every day, we hear stories about the impact of insufficient childcare on the local workforce and local economy. We need the research, data and recommendations as to how we can address this as a community, especially now as Wilkes County is positioned for renewed growth.”

The study will document the current state of childcare in the county along with population and labor market trends. By estimating projected growth, the study will be able to determine what needs will arise for the community in terms of population, childcare and workforce in addition to the gaps that already exist. It will also research innovative childcare systems that could provide widespread benefit to both citizens and local employers.

LeeAnn Nixon, President of the Wilkes Economic Development Corporation, was named to lead the Childcare Taskforce responsible for the study. Nixon stated, “On behalf of the Taskforce and community, we express our gratitude to The Leonard G. Herring Family Foundation for recognizing an important need. Investing in this critical component will lead to a better quality of life and vibrant economy. As we focus on how we can strengthen quality care for our children we are investing in their young lives. Also, we are ensuring caregivers have affordable and sufficient options that lead to successful careers. The Taskforce welcomes the opportunity to listen, observe, seek best practices, and encourage positive outcomes that will strengthen Wilkes County.”

Susan Cogdill, Taskforce Member and Executive Director of the Wilkes Community Partnership for Children (WCPC) said, “As a nonprofit that has spent over 25 years working with childcare centers and families, WCPC recognizes the need for good, quality childcare in Wilkes County. Parents need to work, and businesses need workers. The missing link for parents is often childcare. This study gives us an opportunity to analyze the current childcare landscape, determine gaps and make recommendations to ensure that the Wilkes County

workforce is adequately served with quality childcare. It will make a difference for parents and businesses as greater workforce development for Wilkes is created.”

The taskforce is made up of individuals and organizations whose combined experience was determined to be the most qualified to conduct this study. Wilkes Economic Development Corporation staff members LeeAnn Nixon, Robin Hamby and Caroline Bracey-Adams will be providing marketing and facilitation services to the group during this process. Cyndi Dancy of Dancy Research is set to collect data and economic information to identify current and projected needs in the community. Her partnership with the invaluable academic experience of Dr. Pamela Shue, Ed.D. and her team of graduate students from Appalachian State University will ensure a thorough investigative analysis and proposed recommendations from this process. Susan Cogdill and Michelle Shepherd, incoming Director, from the Wilkes Community Partnership for Children bring years of combined early childhood development experience as well as a network of resources within the community. The Health Foundation Program Manager, Kirstin Roberts, will ensure that this study helps empower families in Wilkes and in turn creates a more resilient community.

The study will run in three phases. The first will be the Discovery Phase, where the team will define the scope of their work, research the current state of childcare in Wilkes County and compile those findings. The Discovery Phase will include identifying all existing licensed public, and private or in-home care facilities for two different age ranges, Birth to Age 5 and Age 5 to 11 years old. That data will be compared to the current population of Wilkes County and evaluated for its effects on labor market trends. During the Discovery Phase, questionnaires will be distributed throughout the community to gather information and identify needs. Participating in these questionnaires and Community Meetings will be critical for Parents, Business Owners, Resource Partners, Local Government Members and Residents. In the second Analysis Phase, both strengths and gaps will be identified in order to evaluate trends and quantify the cost and lost opportunities due to gaps in the existing childcare system. The final phase will provide recommendations for moving forward, producing a broad strategy and action steps that can be taken. The study is estimated to take a period of approximately 10 months to complete. The Wilkes Childcare Study Taskforce encourages community participation in this process and its results.

For more information on the Wilkes County Childcare Study, subscribe for updates and notify us of your interest to participate, please visit <https://info.wilkesedc.com/childcarestudy>

---

## ABOUT

### **The Leonard G. Herring Family Foundation**

The Herring Family Foundation (HFF), based in Wilkes County, honors the civic and philanthropic spirit of Leonard and Rose Herring and their family. Leonard retired from Lowe’s Companies in 1996 after over 40 years of service. As a member of the Office of the President from 1960 to 1978 and then as President and CEO from 1978 to 1996, Leonard oversaw the growth of Lowe’s from a privately-owned 15-store company with \$30 million of annual sales to a public company with more than 365 stores and annual sales of more than \$7 billion. On behalf of the Herring Family, HFF seeks to fund resources that are broadly accessible to members of our communities, and that enable individuals to learn, grow, and provide richer and healthier lives for themselves and their families.

---

## ABOUT

**Dancy Research- Cyndi Dancy** is based in the Piedmont Triad Region of NC and has more than 25 years of economic development experience spanning local and regional organizations such as the Greensboro Chamber. Her specialties include research, geospatial analytics, marketing, and business development. Visit [www.dancyresearch.com](http://www.dancyresearch.com) for more.

**Dr. Pamela Shue**, Ed.D. and M.Ed., works as an associate professor at Appalachian State University but has also worked for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, where she served as the Deputy State Superintendent of Early Education. Prior to that position, she was the director of the NC Division of Child Development and Early Education and an associate professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She has over 30 years' experience in the early childhood education field.

The **Wilkes Economic Development Corporation** aims to facilitate the creation of new jobs and capital investment in Wilkes County through the retention and expansion of existing businesses and the recruitment of new businesses. For more information about economic development in Wilkes, please visit [www.wilkesedc.com](http://www.wilkesedc.com)

**The Health Foundation** helps children and adults in Wilkes County thrive through supporting healthy eating, active living, and resiliency in their neighborhoods, schools, churches, and community. For more information, please visit [www.healthywilkes.org](http://www.healthywilkes.org)

**Wilkes Community Partnership for Children**, a local Smart Start Agency, ensures that young children in Wilkes County enter school healthy and ready to succeed. Visit [www.wilkeschildren.org](http://www.wilkeschildren.org) for more.